

016 by ResonanceAesthetic

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

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Characters: Demogorgon (Stranger Things), Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers & Nancy Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler

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Summary:

the one in which our kids are in for another trip through the upside down, but older and wiser.

1. bird girl

Eleven was gone for two years after she killed the Demogorgon. For two long years, she spread her wings and flew away like a bird. We all thought we had to move on and avoid discussing what had happened. Two years later, Eleven flew back:

The wind and rain pounded on every window in the house. The lightning screamed and the thunder bellowed back. I woke silently. I remember I reached up and felt my ear as if someone's breath had touched it. My own name echoed in my head in a voice so achingly familiar. My feet seemed to barely touch the floor as I sauntered to the basement. The lights flickered. I slowed my step, suddenly afraid. Then, I remember, I began to cry. "Don't be afraid," whispered a voice. Her voice. I stared into the corner where she was. Her eyes stared back. Her untamed brown curls stared back. Her tattered dress stared back.

"It's me, Mike," Eleven's voice wavered. She shakily rose to her feet and walked towards me.

"It's me. I'm back. I'm—" Her face rested in the crook of my neck, and she cried. My arms slowly pulled her closer into the hug. The storm continued to rumble outside for a long time until she stepped away with dry eyes. She took my hand and silently indicated that I follow her. El walked me to her blanket fort that—even though no one had slept there for two years—still stood intact. She sat the both of us down and hesitated to speak.

"I'm sorry I missed your Snow Ball. I didn't know how long I was gone."

I almost laughed. "The Snow Ball doesn't matter anymore. What matters is that you're okay... Are you okay?"

El opened her mouth to speak, but then she decided against it.

I slowly started again, "El, are you okay? What happened?"

"You told me friends shouldn't keep things from each other, but I really think... that you would be safer if I didn't tell you," she looked at me with apologetic eyes, "Is that okay?"

I briefly nodded. My eyes caught the sun creeping over the horizon and the storm dissipating. Shit, I thought, we had stayed up until dawn. I glanced back to El. Her baggy eyes were drooping ever so slightly. The morning light stressed her sunken eyes and the dirt on her face and clothes. I stirred for a moment before speaking up.

“Are you tired?”

“Yes.”

“Do you want me to stay?”

“...Yes.”

My hands wandered for the blanket to cover the both of us, and El flopped onto the pillows. I heard her sigh and I turned my head to look at her. I had no idea what she had gone through for the last two years, and yet she still found the strength to come back home. Her breathing grew slow and quiet as I lay down next to her.

Eleven came back to us two years ago. All of us—me, Will, Dustin, Lucas, and El—are 16-years-old. El’s up-to-date guardian is Chief Hopper and she lives with him, but every so often she knocks on the basement door and stays the night in the blanket fort.

2. will can see

El didn't show up at school today. I don't know whether to be concerned or relieved. One, today marks the second year El has been back with us. Two, maybe Hopper let her stay home for that very reason. I don't know. That's why Dustin, Lucas, and I are biking to Hopper's house to find her. The ride is silent except for the rushed wheezing of everyone on their bikes. That's when Dustin speaks up.

"Hey, what if she's fine and we're biking like 100 miles for no reason?"

I groaned, "Dustin, we're being good friends."

Lucas laughs, "Mike, seriously? Me and Dustin are being good friends. You're being a good *boyfriend!*"

I feel myself blush. Oh my God. Nonononono—"Shut up, you guys! We're here."

I guess we were in earshot of Hopper's house, because he steps out on his front porch and lights a cigarette. When I'm about one yard from his house, I jump off of my bike and sprint towards him.

"Hi, Mr. Hopper. Is El home?"

His face crinkles in confusion. My stomach drops.

"Nope. Thought she was with you. I dropped her off in the morning and I figured she'd be out till nightfall."

Dustin appears breathless next to me.

"Well, sir, would you have any idea as to where she'd be?"

Light bulb. I'm running back to my bike before I can say anything. I'm gasping for air and I can barely hear my friends yelling. I'm back at my house and tearing for the basement door. I damn near rip the door open. She's there. I sigh in relief, but the feeling doesn't last long. El is sitting on the floor, rocking back and forth.

"El?"

She stops rocking and looks back to me with tears in her eyes. She mouths 'Will' and looks away.

"What about Will? Can you tell me?"

I slowly approach her. I crouch down and study her face.

"Will can see, Will can see, Will can see, Will can see..."

"El?"

"Oh my God... Will can see... Oh God..."

I reach for her shoulder to comfort her, but then I retract my hand. Something is terribly wrong. She stares straight forward with glassy eyes. She lets out a sob and...blood starts to trickle from her ears and nose.

"El, oh Jesus. Okay. Stay here... and I'll check on Will. Please... stay safe. You're always safe here. I'll be back soon. I promise."

Oh fuck. Ohhhh sweet fuck. This is anything but orthodox and good. I sprint to Will's house as fast as I can. He's sitting on his porch casually. What the hell is he doing? How the hell is he as relaxed as he is when there's something terrible that has to do with his sorry ass? He sees me almost immediately. I think he can tell how pissed I am. I can see the blood drain from his little goat face.

"Will!" I scream. I'm taken aback by how loud it actually is.

"Mike?" His voice is small. "Mike, what's wrong?"

I feel sick. "What's wrong? What the fuck is wrong? You should be telling me what's wrong! Whatever you did, it broke El!"

He stops breathing for a moment and he starts to look like he's about to cry. He raises his hands to his face.

"I'm so sorry, Mike. I should have told everyone this."

"Told everyone what?"

"I... I can see the Upside Down. Just in glimpses, though. It's been

happening ever since... y'know... when I got back.”

Dumbfounded. “And why did you not tell anyone this?”

“I thought it would go away!”

“But it hasn’t... right?”

Will slowly nods, but weirdly grows silent. Will steps back shakily.

“Will?”

He doesn’t respond. His eyes are fearful. His knees threaten to buckle, but then he comes back.

“Will, what *the fuck* was that?”

“I’m sorry, Mike. You need to leave. Like... right now.”

I don’t understand why he’s acting like this, but I comply.

3. right outside of hawkins

Summary for the Chapter:

heres some fluff.

I hesitantly open the basement door when I get home merely half an hour later.

“El?”

“Here,” she softly murmurs. Her voice is little.

“Are you okay?”

“Not really.”

“I’m sorry I had to leave.”

“It’s fine, Mike.”

Silence follows her words, and I slowly come to an idea.

“Hey, El?”

“Yes, Mike?”

“Have you ever been out of Hawkins?”

She pauses to think. “I don’t think so.”

“Would you like to try it?”

El gives me a small smile. “Sounds fun.”

I reach for her hand, and she lends it to me. I lead her to the garage. Dad’s old car got too ‘old’ for him, so he gave it to me. I open the passenger door for her and help her in. I help myself and adjust the seat—it’s always a bit too far backwards. The car nearly guides itself out of Hawkins. El gapes at the ‘Now Leaving’ sign with awe. Hawkins is all she knows. The car ride is mostly silent, except for the quiet radio and El’s occasional gasps at new shops and opportunities.

The sun is starting to ever so slowly set, and El stares at the wonderful colors the sky is suddenly painted.

I park the car on the side of the road. An open field lay ahead, one of the few fields in this part of Indiana. I get out of the car and take it all in at once. She gets out and is immediately confused.

“Mike, where are we?”

“I thought we might as well stop here before going any further down the highway. I used to come out here as a kid.”

“Why?”

I didn’t quite know the answer to her question.

“I used to think it was because life in Hawkins is so busy and uptight that a kid might need a taste of what life’s like beyond the city.”

She slowly nodded; I assume she wouldn’t know what that would feel like.

I sit on the hood of the car. I watch her slowly come to my side, sit on the hood, and take my hand. The following silence is amicable and understanding. I can tell she’s been trying so hard to become accustomed to daily life in Hawkins rather than her lab days. To fit in with the trends, she even bought glasses similar to those of Barb’s. They also worked when her own two eyes didn’t work as well as her mind’s eye, but that wasn’t often. I think she looks prettier without the glasses, honestly.

We silently agree to keep going down the highway. El goes back to pointing out signs of places she’s never been before. It’s a five-minute drive down to our next destination. I crack a small smile just thinking about where we’re going. We pull into the parking lot. El’s eyes light up almost immediately. She smiles when she looks at me and visibly searches for words to say. I can’t help but laugh.

“Do you like it?”

She looks like a puppy. She’s so adorable. Her cheerful smile says enough, so I unlock the car. It was as if I freed a starved dog. She

runs for the door, realizes she's left me behind, and stops beside the door. There are only 17 Waffle House locations in Indiana alone. Hawkins just so happens to be mere miles away from one. Hawkins also just so happens to house one of the biggest waffle lovers in all of time. Coincidence? I don't really think so.

Only an hour later, we leave from whence we came. I'm in absolute awe. I slowly turn to El as we head to the car.

"Okay. I cannot believe you ate like... 3 whole waffles. Holy shit."

"I was hungry."

"Apparently so."

"Mike."

"Yeah?"

"Those were the best waffles I've ever had. Ever."

"Better than the Eggos you had when you were staying in my basement?"

We stop and stand facing each other in front of the hood.

"Actually... it depends."

"Depends on what?"

"Well, the waffles here taste amazing, but I don't think they'll always stay on my mind. The Eggos from your basement...however...didn't taste that great, but I always think about them and..."

"And what?"

El pauses. She leans on the hood of the car and runs a hand through her messy brown curls.

"I always think about how you kissed me. Remember that? In the middle school lunchroom before the bad people busted in."

I feel the blood rising to my cheeks.

“Yeah, I remember...”

“Do you think you could top that kiss to make me remember tonight for a reason besides the waffles?”

I want to. I really, really want to. To be honest, I’ve been thinking about it since she got back from wherever the Demogorgon took her. I notice the distance between us is too great to be bearable. I start to close in. I think she gets it, because she gets up off of the hood and steps closer. My hand gently slides on her hip.

“Yeah. I think I could do that.”

She cracks a small smile. Our noses bump softly. Her lips ghost over mine and make gentle, timid contact. Her eyes flutter momentarily until they close. She’s kissing me. I kiss her back still ever so gentle.

The ride back into Hawkins was quiet but loving.